
A table of contents for *The Expository Times* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expository-times_01.php

pdfs are named: [Volume]_[Issue]_[1st page of article].pdf

THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

Notes of Recent Exposition.

'And Satan answered the Lord, and said, Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life.' And Satan got *his* answer from a ship's printer the other day. When the *Egypt*, rammed by the *Seine*, was sinking rapidly, William George Jenner, the ship's printer, handed his lifebelt to a woman who had failed to secure one for herself, with the remark, 'Here you are, madam, this is yours,' and then went down with the vessel.

But what did Satan mean by 'skin for skin'? It is agreed all round that the words are proverbial. Did he pick up the proverb in his wanderings? Or is it suggested that he was the author of it? He might have been the author of it. Proverbs as a rule are entirely after the Satan's own heart. They approve of moderation — moderation in eating and in drinking, in saving men's souls, and in destroying women's bodies—moderation in everything. When Jesus said to the young ruler, 'Sell that thou hast, and give to the poor,' Satan whispered, 'Charity begins at home'; and, when he found him hesitate, 'A bird in the hand's worth two in the bush.' The Satan might have been the author of the proverb, 'Skin for skin.'

But what does it mean? Ah, there the agreement ends. The variety of meanings offered is quite extraordinary. They may be found, set forth in perfect clearness, and perfect impartiality, in that greatest, if not latest, of all commentaries on the *Book of Job*, Driver and Gray's in the 'International Critical.'

First comes Olshausen. 'Skin for skin —that means, says Olshausen, 'Leave Job's skin unbroken, and he will so leave you yours.' On which Delitzsch remarks that this seems too indecent even for the devil, and Peake admits that it would be 'rather vulgar.' The indecency and the vulgarity seem to lie in the impudence of the Satan using such familiar language to the Almighty. But that is no objection. The Satan, even of the Book of Job, *is* a vulgar person. But there are other explanations.

Ewald and Dillmann, holding hard by the proverb, say 'skin for skin' is simply 'like for like.' Any man is ready to barter, giving one article as an equivalent for another. How much more ready is the selfish man to give his goods and even his family, to save his life. It is what Jacob did that day Esau came to meet him and four hundred men with him. Dr. Ball, the latest commentator of all, agrees. 'The phrase seems to be used like our *Quid pro quo*.'

A curious and not very comprehensible explanation was suggested long ago by Professor James Robertson in the *Expositor*, of which

DRIVER and GRAY take no account. 'The expression "skin for skin,"' says Dr. Robertson, 'is most naturally explained as a proverbial phrase, originating in the gesture of raising the hand to ward off a blow, or stretching it out to soften a fall. As one puts up his hand to save his face, and would rather suffer the bruise of a limb than the injury of a vital part, so, Job's adversary insinuates, the patriarch would sacrifice one after another of his worldly possessions and bodily comforts to preserve his own life.'

In some agreement with this is the favourite interpretation of the most modern commentators. It comes from Duhm. 'Duhm suggests that the expression may have been that of the Bedawi who tells the shepherd that if he does not give up the hide of his flock, his own skin shall pay the penalty, or the slave-hunter that he can purchase his own life by surrendering his slave or his child.' This is accepted by Strahan: 'The Satan speaks with the coolness of a chartered libertine. The proverb which he quotes with such aptness and insolence in heaven was redolent of earth and its usages. It probably arose among tribes for whom skins were an important article of barter and exchange, and meant, "You give (or get) a skin for a skin's worth." When a shepherd or herdsman was threatened by the Bedawin, he counted himself lucky if he saved his own skin by paying (the skin of) a sheep or ox; and the proverb admitted of many applications in ordinary life.'

But none of these meanings appeals to DRIVER and GRAY. For them 'the meaning apparently is: a man will sacrifice one part of his body to save another, an arm, for instance, to save his head, and he will similarly give all that he has to save his life.' But DRIVER and GRAY are as ready to criticise themselves as their neighbours. And they frankly admit that this explanation of the proverb is not quite satisfactory, since the Hebrew word translated 'skin' is never used for a member of the body. It is the skin and nothing but the skin.

There is one proposal left. It is made by Morris Jastrow. Now Dr. Morris Jastrow was a Jew and had it in him to understand a Jewish proverb. He takes the proverb by itself, as you must do. That is where some of the expositors go astray. They insist on the proverb and its application being in absolute agreement. They say, for example, that the word translated 'for,' being the same in both parts of the verse, must have the same meaning. That is not so. As the Hebrew word sometimes means 'behind' or 'beneath' and sometimes 'on behalf of,' it may have one meaning in the proverb and the other in its application.

What have we, then? 'Skin below skin: yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life.' That is to say, you have only scratched Job's skin yet, cut down to the quick. You have only taken away his property, make him suffer in himself.

If you do not approve — Dr. Ball does not approve. 'Where else,' he asks, 'is property compared with the skin?' If you do not approve, then follow Bishop Gibson and 'leave Satan's old saw in its obscurity.'

In this same *Book of Job* there is another 'skin' proverb, and again Dr. Robertson has an astonishing interpretation. The words this time are Job's own. They have entered the English language as a familiar saying with an unmistakable meaning. But what is the origin of the proverb?

The words are, 'I am escaped with the skin of my teeth' (Job 19^{20}). Talmage says, 'Job's teeth have exercised the forceps of commentators from the earliest times.' To which Dr. Robertson adds, 'and we do not think that the crack American dentist has been more successful than his predecessors. No doubt,' he adds, 'the phrase was proverbial, and it certainly corresponds exactly to one of the most expressive gestures in use at the

present day.' But first of all what do the recent commentators say?

Begin with Bishop Gibson, at whom we left off with the other proverb. 'The meaning is that there is hardly a sound place in his body, nothing but "the skin of his teeth."' The skin of his teeth would then be his gums—with which, as Professor Peake remarks, he must be left, else he could not continue his complaint. And this, Dr. Peake adds aptly, 'might seem credible, if we were not reading the work of a great poet.'

The German commentators have given themselves with German seriousness to amending the Hebrew text. Their interesting efforts are recorded in DRIVER and GRAY. Hupfield was content with 'I escaped with the skin, *i.e.* the life, in my teeth, that is to say with the bare life.' But the reading and meaning which DRIVER and GRAY themselves approve is that of Bickell and Budde: 'I am escaped (with) my flesh in my teeth.' Dr. Ball also counts this the best, and adds a luminous illustration: 'like some animal impeded in its flight by carrying off its young in that way.'

We are some distance away from the proverb in its modern use. Let us return to Robertson: 'When a speaker wishes to indicate absolute deprivation of *everything*, utter and entire poverty, he puts up his closed hand to his mouth, inserts his upper front teeth between the nail and the flesh of his thumb, brings the nail away with a sharp crack, extends the hand with the palm outwards, and ejaculates "ha!" as much as to say, "See! what can you take off there?" A modern Syrian, to express Job's thought, would say, "I am escaped with—see!" making the gesture just described; and all this put down in writing is simply, "I am escaped with the skin of my teeth," in other words, with absolutely nothing.'

The difficulty of believing that a dead body can be raised to life again is not so great as once it was. There is no man of scientific attainment to-day who will say that physical science closes any door. But the difficulty is still very great. And it is felt by an increasing number of persons. For a little science is a dangerous thing. The many who have been put in possession of some scientific knowledge, unbalanced by a historical or philosophical training, deny the possibility of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. But the few of fuller understanding know that in relation to matter 'no possibility' may be turned any day into actual experience. Meantime we must receive with patience and consideration every attempt that is made to account for the belief in the resurrection while rejecting the fact of it.

Such an attempt is made by Mr. Haven McClure, Secretary of the English Council, Indiana State Teachers' Association, in a book entitled *The Contents of the New Testament* (Macmillan; 7s. net). It is a book written, we take it, by a layman, and it has the inevitable weakness of such a book. For you may criticise and condemn the teaching in our theological colleges, but you will not deny that they make certain mistakes impossible. It is with theology as with Latin and Greek. As the classical scholar is at home in a literary atmosphere, so the theological student is at home in the religious atmosphere of the Bible.

But if Mr. MCCLURE has missed an early training in theology, and feels the loss, as Keats felt the want of the discipline of the classics, he is as earnest as Keats was to make it up by diligent study. His book is to be reckoned with on every page, and not least on those pages which explain away the Resurrection. He proceeds cautiously. He makes good, such good as he can make, one step at a time. He begins with 'the third day.'

Taking St. Paul as our earliest witness for the resurrection of our Lord from the dead, he says: 'That Jesus was raised from the dead Paul knows from the evidence of his own sense; but that he

was raised from the dead on the Third Day he knows only "according to the scriptures."' And what is meant by 'according to the scriptures'? We take the phrase as meaning no more than that a prophecy of Scripture was known which promised a resurrection on the third day. Mr. McCLURE takes it otherwise. It means, he says, that St. Paul was indebted to the Old Testament for the idea of a resurrection on the third day, and that without the Old Testament such an idea would not have entered his mind. Now, 'whatever Paul teaches about the Resurrection, we may confidently accept as having been the teaching of the Twelve Apostles and the earliest church.' The conclusion is that there was no resurrection *on the third day*.

There could not have been—though we are not told this at once. This comes out afterwards, when we are reminded of the absurdity of the women going to the tomb to anoint a body which 'in such a hot climate' had lain three days in the grave. No reference is made to the 'four days' in which Lazarus had been dead. It is the old way of arguing. There is no such possibility as a miracle, therefore—and all the rest follows and falls away, item by item.

The next item is the empty grave. St. Paul knew nothing of an empty grave. How does Mr. McCLURE know that? Because he does not speak of it. Does St. Paul speak of the birth in Bethlehem, of the baptism by the Jordan, of the temptation in the wilderness, of the sermon on the Mount, of the transfiguration, of the agony in the garden, of the betrayal by Judas? Does he speak of the two thieves or the parting of the garments?

But the thing that follows is more important. Mr. McCLURE is aware of the absurdity of speaking of a person rising again from the dead when only his soul rose. Yet he believes that only the soul of Jesus rose from the dead. He does not say how such a resurrection as that differs from the resurrection of any other person. But if that is what is meant by 'rising again from the dead,' was ever less appropriate language chosen? Mr. McCLURE has a short and easy way here. 'Bodies in New Testament Palestine were buried in hillsides, and not in the ground, so that "Come forth" (John xi. 43) is more accurate than "Arise."' You simply substitute the one word for the other—and ignore all other references and expressions everywhere.

The last two paragraphs are an appropriate conclusion. This is the first: 'Then what does Paul mean when he says: "If Christ be not raised from the dead, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain" (1 Cor. xv. 14)? Obviously Paul refers to the Christian doctrine of the immortality of the soul, and of the soul of Jesus in particular, which had made its escape from the underworld into heaven (Acts ii. 27). Of this the early Resurrection faith consisted. To-day, if we believe in immortality, we also believe that Jesus is alive as much as any other Christian soul. Is this not a superior conception to that of a dead body reanimated and going through all sorts of efforts to prove its material existence?'

And this is the second: 'Then when the risen Lord appeared to his disciples back in Galilee,—a marvellous evidence of the depth of impression made by that master personality upon all who knew and loved him,—they went forth gladly and fervently to preach the gospel of the Resurrection.'

To which one must add that if they did they were the most guileless and the most gullible men that ever turned the world upside down.

Principal JOHN SKINNER, D.D., late of Westminster College, Cambridge, was Cunningham Lecturer at the New College, Edinburgh, in 1920, and lectured on the prophet Jeremiah. The lectures have now been published at the Cambridge

University Press with the title of *Prophecy and Religion* (12s. 6d. net).

The title is too comprehensive. For Dr. SKINNER keeps strictly to the character and work of Jeremiah. It is also too indefinite. There is no indefiniteness in the lectures. Every point is as clear as pen can make it, and is set forth with unadorned precision. But at the very beginning of the Lectures Dr. SKINNER does deal with Prophecy and Religion. He tells us wherein the experience of the Hebrew prophet differed from the religious experience of other men.

'The prophetic consciousness, as exhibited in the great prophets of Israel, is a variety of the general religious consciousness, involving like it an immediate fellowship of the prophet with God; but both in the sphere of its exercise and in the form of its experience it presents several phenomena which do not belong to the permanent essence of religion.' He names three chief features in which the religious experience of the prophets differed from the normal communion of a Christian with God.

The first feature is this. The prophets were conscious of being intermediaries between Yahwe and the nation of Israel. Yahwe did not address Himself to the individual as He does now. He addressed Himself to the nation. The individual received the message as forming part of the nation. But a personal God cannot hold direct communication with so impersonal a thing as a nation. And so Yahwe chose certain persons to be interpreters to the nation of His will. These persons He called to His side and initiated into His secret, and then sent them to the nation to make known His character and His purpose.

Because they revealed Yahwe's purpose to the people they were called prophets. They spoke for God. It is more than a generation since we gave up the idea that they were called prophets because they predicted the future. But they did predict the future. This is the second feature which Dr. SKINNER discovers in the special endowment of the prophet in Israel.

Since their mission was to the nation, the prophets were politicians. They predicted what was about to befall the nation. That they did so 'miraculously,' Dr. SKINNER does not say. But that is not because he is in any doubt of the fact. It is more probably because he disapproves of the word, and of the whole range of ideas which it represents. Given God, and a man in close enough communion with God, and all that to the uninstructed mind seems miraculous is only natural. And to separate certain results of that communion from the communion itself is to introduce chaos, even moral chaos, into the ways of God's working in the world. 'Few things in prophecy are more striking than the confidence with which it identifies current events with the direct action of Yahwe, or the certainty with which it reads their lesson and predicts their issue.' But how far that prediction was due to 'a presentment borne in on the mind of the prophet by subtle perception of the secret forces that shape the destiny of the world, and how far to an inference from general laws of the divine action,' Dr. SKINNER does not say.

The third feature that was peculiar to the experience of the prophets was the prophetic Vision. But now we must let Dr. SKINNER speak for himself. 'The experience of the prophets contains a sub-conscious element, appearing chiefly in the form of the Vision, which is not characteristic of normal religious life. The prophetic vision is undoubtedly a creation of the sub-conscious mind, working uncontrolled by voluntary reflexion, and producing subjective images which have something of the vividness and reality of actual sense perception. No one denies that such visions were frequent on the lower levels of Hebrew prophecy: "If there be a prophet among you, in visions do I make myself known to him, in dreams do I speak with him" (Num. xii. 6). The only question is whether or to what extent they entered into the

experience of the great literary prophets, whose perception of religious truth seems more akin to what we call intuition than to the obscure psychological phenomena of the dream and the vision. On that point there is room for difference of opinion, and great difference exists. The recent tendency of criticism has been on the whole to hold that the visions recorded by the prophets were actually experienced by them in a condition of comparative ecstasy, in which self-consciousness was not lost, although its control of the visionary process was suspended. But it is held by some that this literal interpretation of the descriptions given by the prophets is not justified: that they are simply using the traditional form of prophetic experience to express ideas which they had apprehended otherwise, either by pure spiritual intuition or by the exercise of their reasoning and reflective powers. Of these opposing views the former alone seems to me to be consistent with the directness and objectivity of the prophets' narration. It must be borne in mind that whatever *we* may think, the claim to have had a vision was taken seriously in ancient times as a proof of inspiration; so that for a prophet to profess to have had a vision when he had not would have been to deceive his public with regard to the validity of his commission to declare the word of God. That in many cases we have a conventional use of stereotyped prophetic phraseology without any corresponding visionary experience is undoubtedly true; but the deliberate report of a vision, especially a vision on which the prophet's whole title to speak in the name of Yahwe depends, stands on a different footing, and cannot be fairly explained as a conscious literary effort to express spiritual truth by the aid of poetic imagination.'

That, then, we take to be the first important contribution to theology which Dr. SKINNER'S Cunningham Lectures have made. They have enabled us to see the difference between the experience of the prophets and the experience of other religious men. But there is another. They also enable us to see, clearly and memorably, the difference between the experience of other prophets and the experience of Jeremiah.

Let us remember that when Jeremiah began to prophesy God addressed Himself to the nation. His only touch with the individual was in the case of the prophets themselves, a few, a very few men, selected and set apart to receive and carry His will to the nation as a whole. The individual knew it only as His word to the peoples of the earth or to His own people in particular, and felt such responsibility as a member of a modern company may feel for the decisions and deeds of the company. And, as with many members of a modern company, he might take no part in its decisions and have but the slenderest sense of responsibility for its deeds. Jeremiah altered all that.

For when God came to Jeremiah He came not to a prophet only but also to a man. For the first time in the history of prophecy the personal life of the prophet was in the sight of God of more consequence than his office. Jeremiah felt it to be more. He found that God regarded it as more. God, he found, could raise up other prophets to take his place; He could not raise up another man to be to Him what Jeremiah was meant to be.

What did this involve? It involved the end of prophecy. Rightly is Jeremiah spoken of as the last of the prophets. For as soon as the man became more than the prophet, the work of the prophet was ended. 'Out of the Hebrew prophet,' says Dr. SKINNER, 'there is created in Jeremiah a new spiritual type—the Old Testament saint: the man who, when flesh and heart fail, finds in God the strength of his heart and his portion for ever (Ps. lxxiii. 26).' Jeremiah embodies the transition from the prophet to the psalmist.

Dr. SKINNER makes no use of this in determining the date of the Psalms. Nor shall we. It is enough to observe that that note of individual responsibility to God which Dr. SKINNER calls

'moral sincerity' is repeatedly struck in the meditations and prayers of the Psalter. 'The deeply exercised writer of the 51st Psalm knows that "truth in the inward parts" is the indispensable condition of restoration to Yahwe's favour and the joy of His salvation; the writer of the 139th revels in the thought of God's exhaustive and unescapable knowledge of him, and closes his meditation of the remarkable prayer, conceived in the very spirit of Jeremiah: "Search me, O God, and know my heart: Try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any way of wickedness in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."'

But now, no sooner has Dr. SKINNER quoted that psalm than he feels the necessity of referring to something in it which is not altogether agreeable to the modern religious mind. It is the sense of satisfaction. There is in this and in other psalms (and in sayings of Jeremiah) that are like it, 'an insistent protestation of integrity which savours of self-righteousness.' It is the difference Christ has made. 'We miss the utter abnegation of merit, the emptying of self, the absolute dependence on a goodness and a love outside of ourselves which regards not our desert but our need, such as are expressed in many favourite Christian hymns.'

And, lest we have forgotten, Dr. SKINNER quotes the best example that can be found. It is Christina Rossetti's:

None other Lamb, none other name,
  None other hope in heaven or earth or sea.
None other hiding-place from guilt and shame,
  None beside Thee!

My faith burns low, my hope burns low;
  Only my heart's desire cries out in me
By the deep thunder of its want and woe,
  Cries out to Thee.

Lord, Thou art Life, though I be dead;
  Love's fire art Thou, however cold I be:
Nor heaven have I, nor place to lay my head,
  Nor home, but Thee.

And then he adds: 'But on the other hand the strong ethical sense of the Psalmists and Jeremiah supplies a needful corrective to the opposite error to which evangelical piety is itself exposed. For if the too obtrusive consciousness of moral sincerity as a claim on the divine mercy involves the danger of spiritual pride, the absence of the thing itself would be fatal to all true godliness; and there is a hypocrisy of self-depreciation into which a spurious and sentimental spirituality is apt to fall. In any case it was a great step in the history of religion to turn from the formalism of an external worship, and the legalism of a national covenant, and to find God in the heart of the individual, as One whose holy and searching presence strengthens every good purpose and pure aspiration that dwells there, and who sets secret sins in the light of His countenance. By the grace of God, Jeremiah took that step, and opened up a way of access to God which many devout souls, following in his footprints, found to be the way everlasting.'

Is this the end? No, the end is not individualism, however evangelically faultless. The end is the Kingdom of God. And even Jeremiah saw it. Of all that we must attribute to Jeremiah of insight into the ways of God with man this is the highest and best. The time came, 'when his private relation to God, combined with other elements in his thinking, broadened out into the conception of a new community of the people of God, based on direct personal knowledge of God such as he alone at this time possessed.'